

## Message Text

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TAGS: SHUM, SY, US

SUBJECT: NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE ON SYRIAN JEWISH BRIDES

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE BY BERNARD  
GWERTZMAN, WHICH APPEARED SUNDAY, JULY 31.

2. BEGIN TEXT: WASHINGTON, JULY 30--AFTER MONTHS OF SEC-  
RET DISCUSSIONS, INCLUDING A PERSONAL PLEA FROM PRESIDENT  
CARTER, PRESIDENT HAFEZ AL-ASSAD OF SYRIA HAS APPROVED AN  
UNUSUAL PLAN THAT ALLOWS JEWISH WOMEN TO EMIGRATE TO THE  
UNITED STATES AFTER PROXY MARRIAGES TO AMERICAN JEWS THEY  
HAVE NOT MET.

(A) IN WHAT WAS REGARDED HERE AS A GESTURE TO THE UNITED  
STATES, MR. ASSAD GAVE HIS CONSENT FOR PROXY MARRIAGES, ON  
JULY 19 IN DAMASCUS, OF 12 WOMEN TO MEMBERS OF THE SYRIAN  
JEWISH COMMUNITY OF BROOKLYN. TWO OTHER WOMEN WERE MARRIED  
IN PERSON TO AMERICANS--CHARLES I. BETESH OF BROOKLYN AND  
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JOSEPH ACKMAN OF BALTIMORE--WHO HAD BEEN IN SYRIA LOOKING  
FOR BRIDES.

(B) THE MATTER IS HARDLY A CRUCIAL ONE FOR AMERICAN FOREIGN  
POLICY, BUT WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS SAID IT HAD BEEN OF PER-  
SONAL CONCERN TO MR. CARTER. THEY SAID MR. ASSAD WAS BEING  
"VERY MAGNANIMOUS" IN HIS ACTION, ALTHOUGH HE HAS MADE NO

COMMITMENT TO ALLOW ALL 500 UNMARRIED WOMEN AMONG SYRIAN JEWS TO LEAVE.

(C) THE PROBLEM HAS ARISEN BECAUSE MOST SINGLE JEWISH MEN HAVE BEEN ABLE TO LEAVE SYRIA OR ARE UNWILLING TO GET MARRIED BECAUSE THEY WANT TO BE ABLE TO LEAVE ON SHORT NOTICE.

(D) THE FIRST PUBLIC WORD OF THE SYRIAN DECISION TO GO ALONG WITH THE PLAN WAS AN ARTICLE IN A BEIRUT NEWSPAPER ON MONDAY REPORTING ON THE PROXY MARRIAGES ATTENDED BY MORE THAN 500 PEOPLE IN A DAMASCUS SYNAGOGUE.

(E) THERE ARE SAID TO BE 5,100 JEWS IN SYRIA, MAINLY IN DAMASCUS, ALEPPO AND THE TOWN OF QAMISHLIYE, ON THE TURKISH BORDER. THIS IS THE LARGEST GROUP OF JEWS IN AN ARAB COUNTRY, A REMNANT OF THE 45,000 WHO LIVED IN SYRIA BEFORE ISRAEL'S CREATION IN 1948.

(F) IN RECENT YEARS, THEY HAVE LIVED IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, WITH DISCRIMINATORY RULES BARRING THEIR TRAVEL WITHIN OR OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY AND THEIR FREEDOM TO SELL PROPERTY. MR. ASSAD IN JANUARY EASED THE RULES BUT STILL REFUSED TO ALLOW JEWS IN GENERAL TO LEAVE FOR FEAR THEY WOULD GO TO ISRAEL.

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(G) REPRESENTATIVE STEPHEN J. SOLARZ, DEMOCRAT OF BROOKLYN, WHOSE DISTRICT ENCOMPASSES THE OCEAN PARKWAY AREA WITH 25,000 JEWS OF SYRIAN BACKGROUND, VISITED DAMASCUS IN DECEMBER TO MEET WITH JEWISH LEADERS AND SYRIAN OFFICIALS.

(H) IN AN INTERVIEW, MR. SOLARZ SAID THE MAIN CONCERN VOICED BY JEWS WAS THE FATE OF THE WOMEN WHO WERE BELIEVED UNLIKELY TO FIND HUSBANDS IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO ASSIMILATE INTO SYRIAN SOCIETY. JEWISH LEADERS ASKED THAT THE WOMEN BE PERMITTED TO EMIGRATE, PREFERABLY TO THE OCEAN PARKWAY AREA, WHERE ARABIC IS SPOKEN AND SYRIAN CUSTOMS ARE FOLLOWED.

(I) SHALOM FINDS INTEREST IN THE PLAN--WHEN MR. SOLARZ RAISED THE MATTER WITH FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS, HE SAID, THEY TOLD HIM THAT THEY "WERE NOT UNSYMPATHETIC TO THE HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS ABOUT WHICH I HAD SPOKEN."

(J) ON HIS RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES, MR. SOLARZ SAID, HE GOT IN TOUCH WITH STEPHEN SHALOM, A LEADER IN THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, WHO WAS RAISED IN THE OCEAN PARKWAY AREA

AND NOW LIVES IN KINGS POINT, L.I.

(K) MR. SHALOM, WHO IS AN INVESTMENT BANKER, SAID IN AN INTERVIEW THAT HE BEGAN GOING AROUND TO SYNAGOGUES AND OTHER GROUPS AND FOUND THERE WAS AN INTEREST IN TRYING TO DO SOMETHING FOR THE WOMEN IN SYRIA.

(L) IN MARCH, MR. SHALOM AND BERT CHABOT, A MEMBER OF THE BROOKLYN COMMUNITY, WENT TO SYRIA AND MET WITH SELIM TOTAH, WHO HEADS THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN DAMASCUS. THEY WERE GIVEN A LIST OF THE 500 WOMEN, MOST OF WHOM WERE POORLY EDUCATED AND SPOKE ONLY ARABIC AND SOME FRENCH; ONLY A FEW KNEW ENGLISH.

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(M) SYRIAN OFFICIALS, IN DISCUSSING THE IDEA OF HAVING THE WOMEN FIND HUSBANDS IN AMERICA, FIRST SUGGESTED THAT THE PROSPECTIVE GROOMS COME TO SYRIA, FIND BRIDES, GET MARRIED AND GO BACK WITH THEM. THIS WAS VIEWED AS NOT PRACTICAL.

(N) MEANWHILE, IN FEBRUARY, SECRETARY OF STATE CYRUS R. VANCE STOPPED OFF IN DAMASCUS ON A TOUR OF THE MIDDLE EAST FOR A TALK WITH MR. ASSAD. THE MATTER OF THE WOMEN WAS RAISED AND MR. ASSAD WAS NOT DISCOURAGING, ACCORDING TO RELIABLE SOURCES.

(O) SOLARZ MEETS WITH CARTER--IN MAY, MR. CARTER WAS DUE TO MEET WITH MR. ASSAD IN GENEVA AS PART OF THE MIDDLE EAST DIPLOMATIC EFFORT. IN ADVANCE OF THAT VISIT, MR. SOLARZ GOT IN TOUCH WITH ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI, THE NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER, WHO HAD BEEN A TEACHER OF MR. SOLARZ AT COLUMBIA, AND MR. BRZEZINSKI ARRANGED FOR MR. SOLARZ TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT.

(P) AS A RESULT, DURING THE MEETING IN GENEVA ON MAY 9, MR CARTER RAISED THE MATTER OF THE JEWISH WOMEN WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD DIRECTLY, ACCORDING TO ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS, AND MR. ASSAD, AFTER SOME INITIAL HESITATION, WAS SAID TO HAVE AGREED.

(Q) IN BROOKLYN, AFTER THE ENCOURAGING NEWS OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING HAD BEEN RELAYED TO MR. SOLARZ, MR. SHALOM AND OTHER LOCAL LEADERS BEGAN SEEKING VOLUNTEERS TO SEND MARRIAGE PROPOSALS TO THE 12 WOMEN AS A START; ANOTHER GROUP OF ABOUT 30 PROPOSALS IS BEING PREPARED.

(R) THE PROPOSALS WERE RECEIVED IN SYRIA IN JUNE, AND IN  
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EARLY JULY MR. SHALOM AND AN AIDE OF MR. SOLARZ, MICHAEL LEWIN, WENT BACK TO SYRIA AND WERE TOLD THAT PERMISSION HAD BEEN GRANTED FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE 12 BY PROXY.

(S) NOT LEGAL IN NEW YORK STATE--MR. SHALOM SAID THAT AN UNDERSTANDING HAS BEEN WORKED OUT WITH THE AMERICAN AND SYRIAN JEWS INVOLVED IN THE MARRIAGES. THE PROXY MARRIAGES CONDUCTED BY THE DAMASCUS RABBI, ARE LEGAL IN SYRIA, BUT NOT IN NEW YORK. MR. SHALOM SAID THE MARRIAGES WOULD NOT BE CONSUMMATED UNTIL "SUCH TIME AS BOTH AGREED TO GO AHEAD."

(T) MR. SHALOM SAID THAT WHEN THE FIRST GROUP OF WOMEN ARRIVES IN BROOKLYN NEXT WEEK, THEY WILL BE PLACED IN PRIVATE HOMES, NOT THOSE OF THE GROOMS. HE SAID THE "HUSBANDS" WILL VISIT THE WOMEN AND IT WILL BE UP TO THEM TO DECIDE ON THEIR FUTURE. IF THEY DECIDE TO BE HUSBAND AND WIFE THEY WILL HAVE ANOTHER WEDDING, INCLUDING A CIVIL LICENSE.

(U) REPRESENTATIVE SOLARZ SAID: "WE ANTICIPATE THAT AFTER THE COUPLES HAVE GOTTEN TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER, OFFICIAL CEREMONIES WILL BE HELD HERE AS WELL, AND WE INTEND TO INVITE THE PRESIDENT AS BEST MAN."

(V) THE MARRIAGES WILL BE SUFFICIENT FOR THE SYRIANS TO ALLOW THEM TO LEAVE, AND THEY WILL BE ADMITTED TO THE UNITED STATES UNDER THE SPECIAL PAROLE AUTHORITY OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS SAID.

(W) MR. SHALOM SAID ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CLASSES WERE BEING PLANNED FOR THE WOMEN, MOST OF WHOM ARE IN THEIR TWENTIES. JOBS HAVE BEEN FOUND FOR THREE OF THE 12 ALREADY. END TEXT. CHRISTOPHER

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